FOOD CULTURE IN GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE

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The article outlines two opposing trends regarding food culture in contemporary Great Britain and France - embracing of cultural diversity and adherence to ethnic food behaviour, with an emphasis on the correlation between food, identity and immigration. An attempt has been made to analyse these trends using Hofstede's cultural dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and individualism versus collectivism.

Keywords: food, identity, immigration, Great Britain, France

Introduction

Food culture refers to the ways in which different groups of people select, obtain, prepare, distribute and eat food. Food plays a central role in every culture and is assigned rich symbolic meaning- not only because food is essential for sustaining life but also as a result of the psychological aspect of ingestion or incorporation. There are many examples of associations between food and its incorporated characteristics in different cultures, reflected in the proverbial saying, "You are what you eat", for instance, some Asian Indians eat walnuts to improve their brain, while some Native Americans believe that because milk is food for infants, it will weaken adults [Kittler et al. 2012:2]. Also, the correlation between food and identity stems to a large extent from the psychological aspect of incorporation. Food choice is influenced by self-identity, a process whereby the food likes or dislikes of someone else are accepted and internalized as personal preferences- research shows that children choose foods eaten by admired adults, fictional characters, peers and especially older siblings [Ibid. 3]. This psychological factor determining food choice emphasizes the role of food in relation to the group we identify with and want to belong to. The close correlation between food and identity is exemplified in the fact that retention of ethnic food behavior is one of the most enduring aspects of a migrant culture, as shown in many studies [Helman 1994, Jerome 1969, cited in Chowdhury et al. 2000:210].

On the other hand, food habits within a culture reduce the anxiety related to the dilemma of the so called omnivore's paradox. Being omnivorous, humans need to be flexible enough to eat variety of items sufficient for physical growth and maintenance, yet cautious enough not to randomly ingest foods that are harmful. The framework of food habits of a

culture, i.e. the rules about which foods are edible, how they are procured, cooked safely, etc., provide guidelines for both experimentation and conservatism [Kittler et al. 2012:2]. This vital balancing function of culture regarding food is yet another factor that makes the migrants' food habits especially difficult to acculturate. The function is implicit but very powerful and is exemplified, to cite an instance, in the halal (permitted) and haram (forbidden, e.g. pork and wine) food among Muslim people and diaspora.

Current trends in British food culture

Modern British food culture reflects recent changes in social life and economy. In the last 50 years industrialization of foodstuff, the new role of women in the workplace and home, fragmentation of family life, foreign travel (which is no longer a luxury) and immigration have remodeled food mores and attitudes dramatically [Chiaro 2008:195-96]. These changes have resulted in the emergence of three trends:

-take-aways, ready meals and convenience foods representing the major part of food market section;

-preference for eating out;

and, above all,

-the assimilation of new, foreign foods, i. e. the flavours of "others", making the taste of UK consumers more cosmopolitan [Ibid.].

In particular, intense foreign travel, globalization of the food market, immigration, Britain's colonial past and, as a result, the multicultural character of British society play a major role in shaping the cosmopolitan taste of British consumers. On the other hand, the preference for easy to prepare and less time-consuming food is tied to the demands of the busy life of the modern man, the new role of women and the new model of family dynamics.

The above-mentioned trends are interrelated.

The custom of "eating out" was enhanced by ethnic influences and promoted the assimilation of other cuisines [Chiaro 2008:198]. Inexpensive Chinese and Indian restaurants spread dramatically from the late 1950s, followed by Cypriot and Middle Eastern establishments, while French cuisine occupied the higher-price and higher-class niche segment of the market [Oddy 2003:197, cited in Chiaro 2008:198]. Indian and Chinese ethnic food are traditionally the two most popular kinds of ethnic foods in the UK, while at the same time Indians are the largest non-white ethnic population in the UK [ONS 2001]. India and China also hold the first and second place in the top five countries of origin for immigrants coming to the UK in recent years [ONS 2012]. Work in the food sector, often as a family-run business, has long been a key to survival of immigrants.

Great Britain- a food culture embracing cultural diversity

According to 2009 figures, the UK leads the EU ethnic cuisine pack in terms of market value, with France and Germany the second and third most significant markets [Bouckley

2011]. In its 2011 report Ethnic Foods, the market research firm Keynote estimates that the Chinese cuisine amounts to 27.5 % of the market in value terms compared to 41.7 % of the Indian cuisine in the UK, which has long been the British favourite ethnic cuisine[1] [Bouckley 2011]. The report also points to some novel cuisines as other "major players on the up": the Carribbean and Polish cuisines. Carribbeans are the fourth largest non-white ethnic group in the UK [ONS Census 2001] and there is a large Polish population in the UK. Polish is the most commonly spoken non-native language in England and Wales and there has been a peak in Polish immigration over the past decade [Rayney 2013], ranking Poland on the fourth place in the top five countries of origin for 2011 [ONS 2012]. According to the How Britain Eats 2011 Report of industry analysts Allegra Strategies, UK consumers rank Italian as the nation's favourite cuisine when dining out [New research provides insight into nation's eating habits 2011]. Allegra's research of over 2000 UK consumers show that they are influenced by the breadth of Italian focused eating out chains, through a "renaissance" by Jamie Oliver, Carluccios and Pizza Express [Ibid.]. The report also points to British food being the second most popular dishes on the menu when dining out (thanks to "a greater food focus by pub groups and carvery chains, driving a growing appreciation of British food") [Ibid.]. Italians had been present in the catering trade since the turn of the century but in the 1960s they began to invest in sandwich bars providing for the "snacking lifestyle" that was beginning to grow and in the first pizzerie [Chiaro 2008:198].

These characteristics of the current food market demonstrate the transformation of the traditional British "meat and two veg" diet of the 1950s into a food culture embracing ethnic diversity, largely a result from the intensive migration after World War II, and reflecting the multicultural character of British society. And, as Stedman points out, "Food in general is a useful marker of cultural exchange because changes in diet as well as changes in the representation of diet tell us about the way one culture reacts to the impact of another, not only in material terms but also in terms of self-identification and self-fashioning" [Stedman 2006:270]. This function of diet is largely grounded on the correlation between food and identity.

Furthermore, there is also a close relationship between food making/consumption, self-identity and the concept of home. Our knowledge and experience of food comes primarily from home and this is both social and a personal experience which contributes to the net of social relationships and to our identities [Rabikowska 2010:378]. This relationship is exemplified in the fact that though Britons are adventurous when eating out and choose from a variety of ethnic cuisines, traditional British food is still the first choice when eating at home- with "roast dinners and stews in the Top 10 most frequently cooked dishes" [New research provides insight 2011].

On the other hand, British adventurous taste for the different and unusual has also been an important factor in shaping the gastronomic variety in contemporary UK.

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[1] However, according to a 2010 study, Chinese food beats British, Thai and even Indian curry to become the nation's favourite cuisine [Chinese food beats British 2010]. The study also lists the top 10 favourite cuisines in the UK as follows: 1.Chinese 2.Indian 3.British 4. Italian 5. Thai 6. American 7.Mexican 8. Japanese 9. Greek 10. French [Ibid.].

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism and uncertainty avoidance might give an interesting account for Britain's taste for different and exotic cuisines. The UK scores a very high level of individualism (89) and a very low level of uncertainty avoidance (35) [Hofstede 2013].

Hofstede defines the notion of individualism in the following way: "The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members. It has to do with whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family only. In Collectivist societies people belong to 'in groups' that take care of them in exchange for loyalty." [Ibid.].

He defines the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance as "The extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these." [Ibid.]. Risks that involve change and difference are difficult for people from cultures with strong uncertainty avoidance and this is especially a concern when changes threaten acceptance by the group [Kittler et al. 2012:59]. For example, people from such cultures may resist certain preparations or seasonings if family members object or if the food might undermine cultural identity [Ibid.].

Hofstede comments on the UK's combination of high degree of individualism and low score of UAI in the following way: "Most importantly the combination of a highly individualistic and curious nation is a high level of creativity and strong need for innovation. What is different is attractive! This emerges throughout the society in [its] heavy consumerism for new and innovative products" [Hofstede 2013].

Ethnic minorities reveal an opposite trend in food culture

However, there exists another trend in food culture in the UK which is diametrically opposed to embracing gastronomic difference and diversity. This second trend regards minority ethnic populations and is most pronounced in older or first-generation immigrants who tend to preserve their ethnic food habits. As mentioned previously, ethnic food behavior is one of the most enduring aspects of a migrant culture [Helman 1994, Jerome 1969, cited in Chowdhury et al. 2000:210] and this particularity of migrant's culture is very much dependent on the close correlation between food and self-identity, ethnic identity respectively.

Rabikowska [2009] studies the role of food in creating a sense of inclusion and stability among Polish migrants in London. She emphasizes the relationship between food consumption and preparation, home and national identity. According to Rabikowska, "consuming and preparing "Polish food" is an act of ritualizing belonging and also delineating the difference between "Polish" and "others", and in that sense it is an act of both acceptance and estrangement" [Rabikowska 2009:379]. According to her study, the migrants defined Polish food as "normal", revealing the opposition between "own" and "normal", and, on the other hand, "theirs" and "abnormal" [Rabikowska 2009:380]. Also, the attitude of Polish migrants to any kind of food which is not of Polish taste, texture, look or smell is described as "very cautious and even hostile" [Ibid.]. Polish food is perceived by the migrants

as healthier and better because it is cooked at home, while English food is seen as too greasy and void of "real unprocessed" content [Ibid.].

Similarly, according to a study by Chowdhury and colleagues [2000], first-generation adult immigrant Bangladeshis[2] retain to a very high degree their traditional ethnic dietary habits and any changes made are in the form of elaboration rather than adaptation on the host culture. Also, eating behavior within the South Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern communities are heavily influenced by religion and Islam is the largest religion in Bangladesh. Though not all British Bangladeshis in the study reported to attend the Mosque regularly, they strongly adhered to Islamic norms regarding permitted (halal) and forbidden (haram) food [Chowdhury et al. 2000:211]. Not a single informant admitted transgressing these religious norms with regard to food [Ibid.]. This fact emphasizes the central role of food and its symbolism within religion and culture as a whole. The psychological aspect of incorporation of food and its correlation with identity is also highlighted.

The UK and France have large and growing Muslim populations and are major markets for halal. Also, Great Britain has recognized religious needs and adapted policies to accommodate Muslim groups and halal requirements.

The cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism is another factor that may have a role in determining the adherence of ethnic minority communities to their ethnic food habits. The UK scores very high on individualism (89), making it one of the most individualistic nations. To compare, France scores 71 on individualism, Poland 60, India 48, the Arab World 38 and Bangladesh 20 [Hofstede 2013]. At the same time, non-white ethnic minorities represent 14% of the total population in England in Wales [ONS 2011] and 8.4 % in Scotland [Scottish Government 2004].

Gaines and colleagues [Gaines et al. 1997, cited in Acevedo 2003:10] carried out a study on the relation between ethnic identity, individualism and collectivism. Their sample included 51% Anglos, 7% African American, 17% Latina/Latino, 21% Asian American and 1% Mixed. The results revealed that men of colour (but not women) scored significantly higher on ethnic identity than did Anglos. Also, ethnic identity was found to be significantly and positively correlated with collectivism and familism. The authors concluded that ethnic identity is a mediator among ethnicity, individualism and collectivism [Ibid.].

Willis [2012] argues for a similar correlation between individualism, collectivism and ethnic identity. In her study she uses a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with older people from five different ethnic groups in the UK. According to Willis, a strong sense of ethnic identity is linked with identifying with the collective rather than the individual. Another interesting proposition in Willis's paper is that ethnic identity becomes salient after migration and becoming a part of an ethnic minority group in the new country. Therefore, according to the author, white British people who have never migrated do not have a great sense of ethnic identity [Ibid.].

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[2] British Bangladeshis are the sixth largest non-white ethnic population in the UK [ONS Census 2001].

Food culture in contemporary France

Food behavior of the French people constantly evolves. This phenomenon is linked to a sociological change in eating attitudes and a structural reorganization of the market. Current trends in contemporary French cuisine are shaped by a variety of factors- economy pressure, time pressure and related changes in time distribution, new position of women in the labour market, industrialization of the food market, urbanization and health issues related to diet. All of these factors resemble the aforementioned changes in social life and economy influencing food mores and attitudes in Britain and they build a model of food consumption which is less dependent on tradition and customs [Duriez 2012].

On the other hand, France takes pride in its national culinary culture and tradition which is related to a certain lifestyle. In November 2010 French gastronomy is included in UNESCO's list of the world's intangible cultural heritage. France still ranks first in the world in time spent eating which emphasizes the importance the French attach to the different aspects of the act of eating- social, hedonistic, aesthetic, related to health and other [Olivier 2009]. Taste is the foremost criterion which prompts a French consumer to pay a higher price for a food product. The demand for aesthetics in food products is a growing trend in the consumption sector as a whole. French food culture has developed an especially powerful hedonistic approach through conviviality- positive emotions related to food taste and sharing pleasure from eating [Duriez 2012]. In the last twenty years there is also a growing trend in recognizing the role of food consumption for maintaining good health, a national programme for healthy eating is developed and according to every fifth French person, a good diet can prevent problems related to health [Olivier 2009]. According to 84% of French consumers, "produced in France" is a guarantee for quality, and, according to 65%- a guarantee for finest taste [Duriez 2012].

All of these particularities of French food culture emphasize the importance the French people place on food and national culinary tradition.

Immigration and ethnic cuisines in France

Like Britain, France once had a vast empire. Many immigrants from these former colonies have settled in Paris over the past 60 years: Senegalese, Cameroonians, Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans, Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, etc. Immigrants in France, just like immigrants in Great Britain, preserve their ethnic food habits, too. They have put a lot of effort into reproducing the cuisine of their countries, making Paris a place where you can take "a culinary journey" [Snaije 2011].

In her interviews with foreign communities in Paris, Snaije, a journalist, writes: "Discussing, preparing and eating food from the countries they [the immigrants] had left behind was essential — it was a soothing and even healing ritual. It was a poetic way of remembering the good things about their countries" [Puckette & Snaije 2007, cited in Sullivan 2007].

Immigrants in France constitute 11.1% of the total population, a percentage ranking France eleventh in the world [Eurostat 2010]. According to number of immigrants, France is fourth among EU countries and the UK fifth [UN 2005]. Nearly 50% of immigrants in France come from Africa and Asia, the majority from Maghreb countries in North Africa (29,7%)- Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia [INSEE 2012].

This ethnic composition of immigrant population in France is the factor determining the role of the North African cuisine as the most popular ethnic cuisine in the country.

Also, just like in Great Britain, work in the food industry is fundamental for the immigrants'subsistence and social integration. Employment in sectors such as food delivery provides good remuneration and can be the groundwork for the social integration and well-being of immigrants.

Although ethnic restaurants have had to fight for a place of their own into the "French consciousness", they are now part of everyday life [Snaije 2011].

The dishes of North Africa have had an especially strong influence on the French diet. During the World War I, immigrating Algerians first brought couscous to France and "It didn't take long for couscous to become unofficially French" [Puckette & Snaije 2007]. Couscous was elected as the third favorite dish of French people in 2011 in a study by TNS Sofres and the first in East of France [Les plats préférés des Français 2011]. The first takeout shop in Paris was for couscous [Puckette & Snaije 2007].

There is also a growing trend in Parisian bakeries Maghreb delicacies to be sold successfully alongside French baguettes, croissants and brioches. The large immigrant population in the food trade uses its ethnic culinary tradition to meet the demand for such products [Barou 2010].

But despite the large immigrant population and the respective significant market share of ethnic cuisines (France is the second most significant market of ethnic cuisines in the EU in terms of market value [Bouckley 2011]), French food is still indubitably the most popular and most highly valued among the French.

The pride the French take in their food culture is undoubtedly the foremost factor contributing to the preeminence of the French national cuisine. However, the extremely high score for UAI (uncertainty avoidance index)- 86, one of the highest, perhaps also plays a role. Although French haute cuisine is characterized by very intricate preparations, the French also consume a lot of quality fresh and whole, unprocessed foods like whole grains, fruit and vegetables [Marcus 2013:275, Clouatre 2009:227, Duriez 2012] and high uncertainty avoidance cultures have a focus on purity and simplicity in food and drink [Hofstede 2001:170; De Mooij & Hofstede 2002, De Mooij 2010, cited in De Mooij & Hofstede 2010]. Furthermore, ethnic cuisines offer different and new products on the food market while a high UAI score is positively correlated with conservatism and negatively correlated with change and innovation. The French are very creative in assimilating foreign foods in a delightful way but it is also true that "ethnic" restaurants in France might "offer inauthentic cooking reflecting what the French think this cuisine should be". [Brevet 2009]. French cuisine is often described as "conservative" [Brevet 2009, Ferguson 2001:29-30, Aharoni 2007]. Also, unlike the American "foodie" movement, French "authenticity" movement is mainly focused on the French region and its "territoir" and not on ethnic cuisines [Shields-Argelès 2007].

Conclusion

In the present paper the authors have examined current trends regarding food culture in Great Britain and France with an emphasis on the correlation between food, identity and

cultural exchange. The authors have also made an attempt to analyze some trends in food behavior of the respective cultures using Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory.

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